

Our Times in Prophecy, No 4.

BY JOHN CULP.

Origin, Rise and decline of the little horn.

I now proceed to show the rise of the little horn in the Roman Empire; in other words, the rise of the Papacy; or in another way of speaking, the rise of that spiritual authority in the empire; or still in other words; when Christianity began to become popular in the Roman Empire.

We all recollect what was pointed out in No. 3 to indicate the origin and rise of the little horn, as well as that of the ten horns; the latter was indicated by governmental neglect in the Empire; the former is indicated by Christianity becoming popular in the Empire.

The governmental neglect of the Empire and its ruinous effect have been noticed to have occurred between A. D. 180, and A. D. 268, which we claim fulfills the prophecy by Daniel that this power was to break into ten divisions; and in this same time, we look for the origin and rise of the little horn, only that it is to rise into preeminence in the empire somewhat later.

In the foregoing article we read of Marcia, the mistress of Commodus, how that she poisoned him and caused him to be strangled on his bed, and while the act may have been justified, yet it seems singular to learn that she was the first of all that stood closely related to the capital that professed themselves to be the patroness of the Christian religion.

The following quotations upon the subject are from the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Chapter 16*, which describe the rank that Christians occupied under the reign of Commodus and forward; speaking of his lenity toward the Christians, it is stated: "The celebrated Marcia, the most favored of his concubines, and who at length contrived the murder of her imperial lover, entertained a singular affection for the oppressed church; and though it was impossible that she could reconcile the practice of vice with the precepts of the Gospel, she might hope to atone for the frailties of her sex and profession by declaring herself the patroness of the Christians."

Severus was the next emperor, who reigned from A. D. 193-211. He "was persuaded in a dangerous sickness that he had derived some benefit, either spiritual or physical, from the holy oil with which one of his slaves anointed him. He always treated with peculiar distinction several persons of both sexes who had embraced the new religion. The nurse as well as the preceptor of Caracalla were Christians." "Under the reign of Severus, the fury of the populace was checked; the rigor of ancient laws was for sometime suspended; and the provincial governors were satisfied with receiving an annual present from the churches within their jurisdiction as the price or as the reward of their moderation." However a persecution broke out in the latter time of the reign of Severus. After this there is a period of thirty-eight years of peace. "Till this period they had usually held their assemblies in private houses and sequestered places. They were now permitted to erect convenient edifices for the purpose of religious worship. This long repose of the church proved favorable to the churches, and the eminent persons of the Christian sect, 'instead of being reduced to implore the protection of a slave or a concubine, were admitted into the palace in the honorable character of priests and philosophers.'"

Alexander reigned A. D. 225-235. "In his domestic chapel he placed the statues of Abraham, of Orpheus, of Opollonius, and of Christ, as an honor justly due to those respectable sages who had instructed mankind in the various modes of addressing their homage to the supreme and universal Deity. A purer faith as well as worship was openly professed and practiced among his household. Bishops, perhaps for the first time were seen at court." But again a persecution broke out under the reign of Maximin, but reverted into the favor of the Christians under the reign of the emperor Philip who, for the "constant reverence for the ministers of the church, gave some color to the suspicion which prevailed in his own times, that the emperor himself was become a convert to the faith." But a terrible persecution was

again inaugurated when Decius ascended the throne, A. D. 249, about which the Historian remarks: "Were it possible to suppose that the penetration of Decius had discovered pride under the disguise of humility, or that he could foresee the temporal dominion which might insensibly arise from the claims of spiritual authority we might be less surprised."

But what is said of the successor of Decius? It is stated that in the first part of the reign of Valerian that "he surpassed in clemency those princes who had been suspected of an attachment to the Christian faith." But in the last three years and a half of his reign he was urged to imitate the severity of his predecessor Decius.

The reader will please bear in mind that this is what we call the origin and the rise of the little horn. We are now down to Gallienus whose reign was from A. D. 260-268. In the following words the Historian continues: "The accession of Gallienus which increased the calamities of the Empire, restored peace to the church; and the Christians obtained the free exercise of their religion by an address to the bishops, in such terms as seem to acknowledge their office and public character. The ancient laws, without being formally repeated were suffered to sink into oblivion; and (excepting only some hostile intentions, which are attributed to the emperor Aurelian) the disciples of Christ passed above forty years in a state of prosperity, far more dangerous to their virtue than the severest trials of persecution."

The Historian next relates the dissension that Paul of Samosata created in the church. He was a very corrupt bishop in Antioch and greatly in the minority, and the parties created such a hatred toward each other that their difficulty was brought before the Emperor Aurelian, who reigned A. D. 270-275. The following is deducted from this instance which also proves the rise of the little horn. "This public and very singular trial affords a convincing proof that the existence, the property, the privileges, and the internal policy of the Christians were acknowledged, if not by the laws, at least by the magistrates, of the empire." In the discussion of the case it is admitted that Aurelian, though a Pagan and a soldier, rendered a decision according to the Christian faith and on the side of the great majority; but for all this the policy in thus acting comes up in the mind of the critic and is expressed in these words: "But while we applaud the justice, we should not overlook the policy of Aurelian who was desirous of restoring and cementing the dependence of the provinces on the capitol, by every means which could bind the interest or prejudices of any part of his subjects."

We have now traced the rise of the little horn a little beyond A. D. 260, where it was calculated that the ten horns had their rise, and we think a little farther attention to Christianity and it will be manifested that it will be the absorbing topics in the Roman empire.

We next try to observe the attitude of the Christians in the Roman Empire between A. D. 284 and A. D. 305 under the reign of Dioclesian. His wife and daughter both embraced the Christian religion and "their example was imitated by many of the most considerable officers of the palace, who, in their respective stations, had the care of the imperial ornament, of robes, of the furniture, of the jewels, and even of the private treasury; and though it might be sometimes incumbent on them to accompany the emperor when he sacrificed in the temple, they enjoyed, with their wives, their children, and their slaves, the free exercise of the Christian religion." But as the Historian adds, "an attentive observer might discern some symptoms that threatened the church with a more violent persecution than any which she had yet endured." The rapid progress of the Christians, which the Pagans held as a recent and obscure sect, and the supernatural powers which the church assumed, inspired terror and emulation in the Pagans.

Dioclesian of course was lenient towards the Christians and so was Constantine, an associate in the empire, but the other two associates, Galerius and Maximian "entertained the most implacable aversion for the name and religion of the Christians."

It is supposed that the secret counselling that was continued one whole winter in the palace among the rulers had but one subject, and that was how to impede the progress of Christianity. A terrible persecution followed, but what did it avail in the way of suppressing Christianity? Galerius finally became the head of a portion of the empire, where he as principal author of the persecution could vend his fury with all of his force to the extirpation of Christianity, but it finally suggested itself to the mind of Galerius, and he convinced himself that the most violent efforts of despotism are insufficient to extirpate Christianity. And it is stated that he desirous of repairing the mischief that he had occasioned, he published in his own name and those of Licinius and Constantine a general edict in which he extends to the unhappy Christians the effects of his wonted clemency of which the following is a part, "We permit them therefore freely to profess their private opinions, and to assemble in their conventicles without fear or molestation, provided always that they preserve a due respect to the established laws of the government. By another rescript we will signify our intentions to the judges and magistrates; and we hope that our indulgences will engage the Christians to offer up their prayers to the Deity whom they adore, for our safety and prosperity, for their own and for that of the Republic."

What more could the Christians ask for as an opportunity to captivate the Roman empire. This is the rise of Christianity, or that spiritual authority which was to come to maturity after the reduction of the Roman empire into many kingdoms which occurred as noticed about A. D. 260.

Not being powerful enough to check the progress of Christianity in the empire by their last united effort with the law and the armies on their side we may easily guess—when we understand the disposition of Rome and the straits he is in now—the future of Rome and Christianity under the next emperor and this we have fully portrayed to us in the account of the emperor Constantine. Thus it is stated of him. "From the first moment of his accession he declared himself the protector of the church, at length deserved the appellation of the first emperor who publically professed and established the Christian religion. The motives of his conversion, as they may variously be deduced from benevolence, from policy, from conviction, or from remorse, and the progress of revolution which under his powerful influence and that of his sons, rendered Christianity the reigning religion of the Roman empire, will form a very interesting and important chapter in the present volume of this history. At present it may be sufficient to observe, that every victory of Constantine was productive of some relief or benefit to the church."

When we come to peruse history on the subject of Christianity for quotations to prove that the Christian religion predominated in the Roman empire in the time of Constantine we are almost at a loss what to quote if we do not quote the whole history for it all bears clearly on that point and establishes it as a fact that Christianity absorbed the attention of the whole empire. We will however add a few more and therewith be content.

"The conquest of Italy produced a general edict of toleration; and as soon as the defeat of Licinius had invested Constantine with the sole dominion of the Roman world, he immediately, by circular letters, exhorted all his subjects to imitate, without delay, the example of their sovereign, and to embrace the divine truth of Christianity."

"The regular correspondence which connected the bishops of the most distant provinces, enabled them freely to communicate their wishes and designs, and to transmit without danger any useful intelligence, or any pious contributions, which might promote the service of Constantine, who publically declared that he had taken up arms for the deliverance of the church."

"His vanity (Constantine's) was gratified by the flattering assurance, that he had been chosen by heaven to reign over the earth, success had justified his divine title to the throne, and that title was founded on the truth of the Christian revelation."

Continued next week.